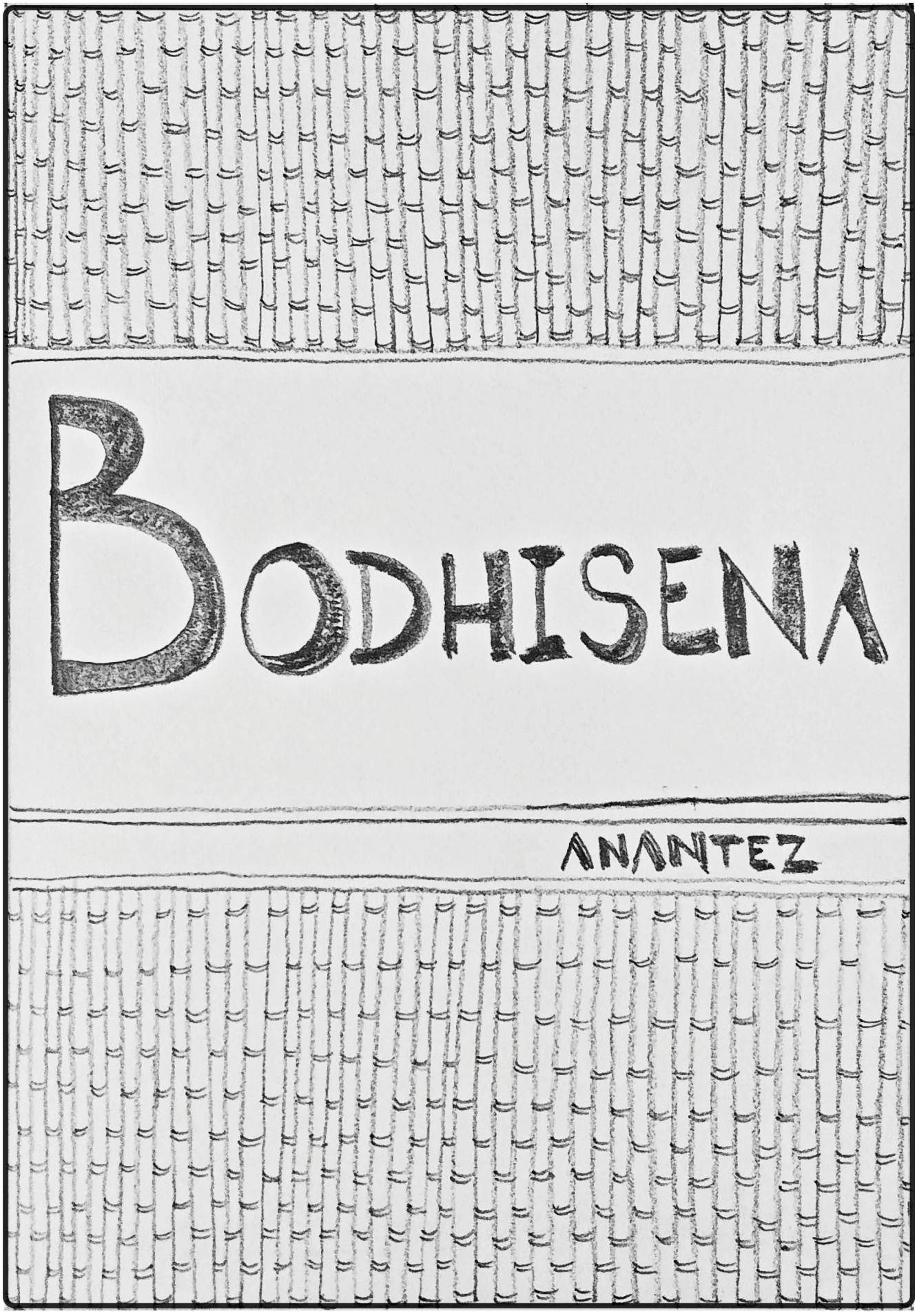
Bodhisena by Anantez



Made by Aayush D Bappa,
penname 'Anantez',
as a project for the
post-graduate course,
'Literarture and the
Contemplative Life' at the
Department of English,
Jadavpur University, 2025

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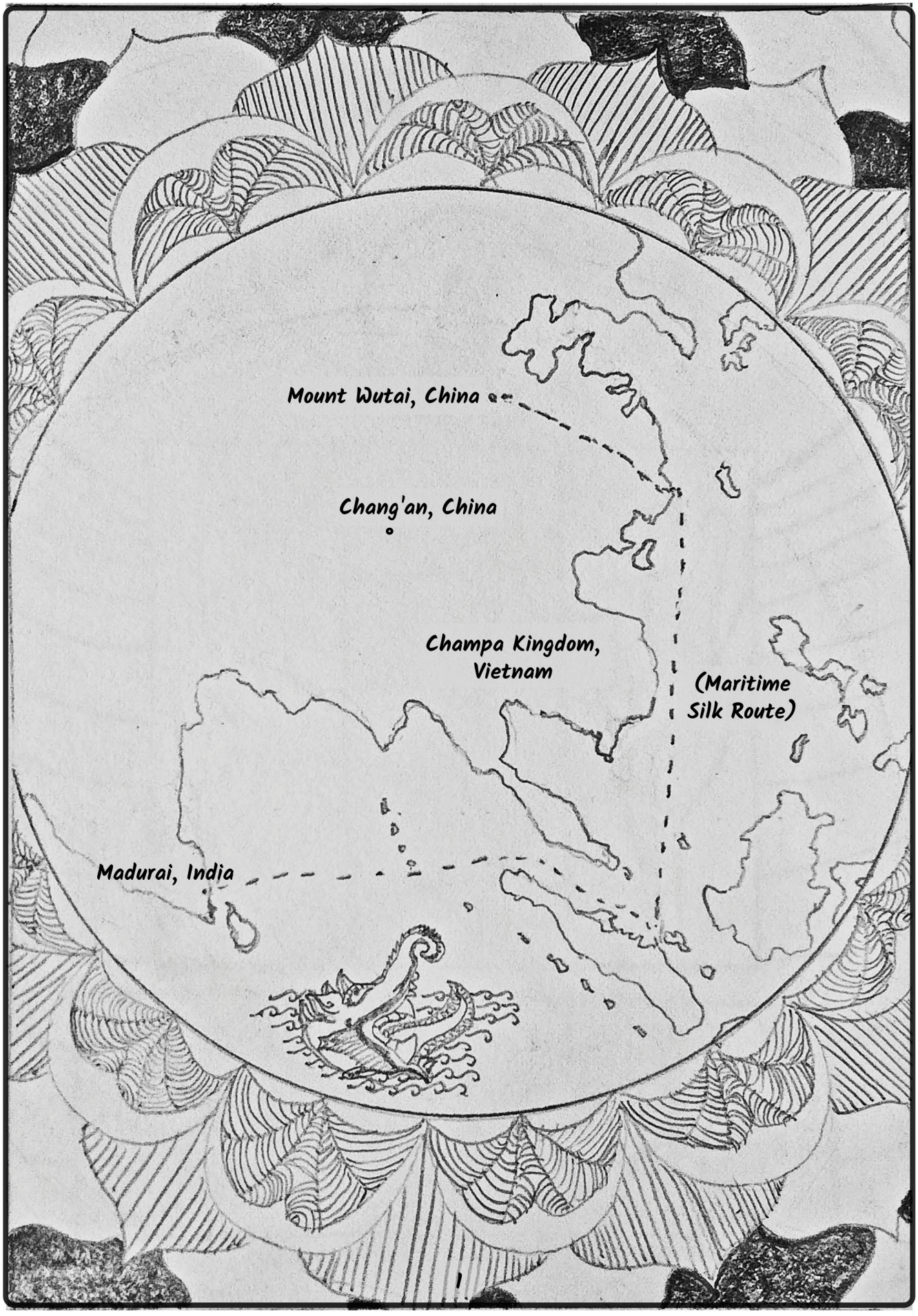
Bodhisena by Anantez



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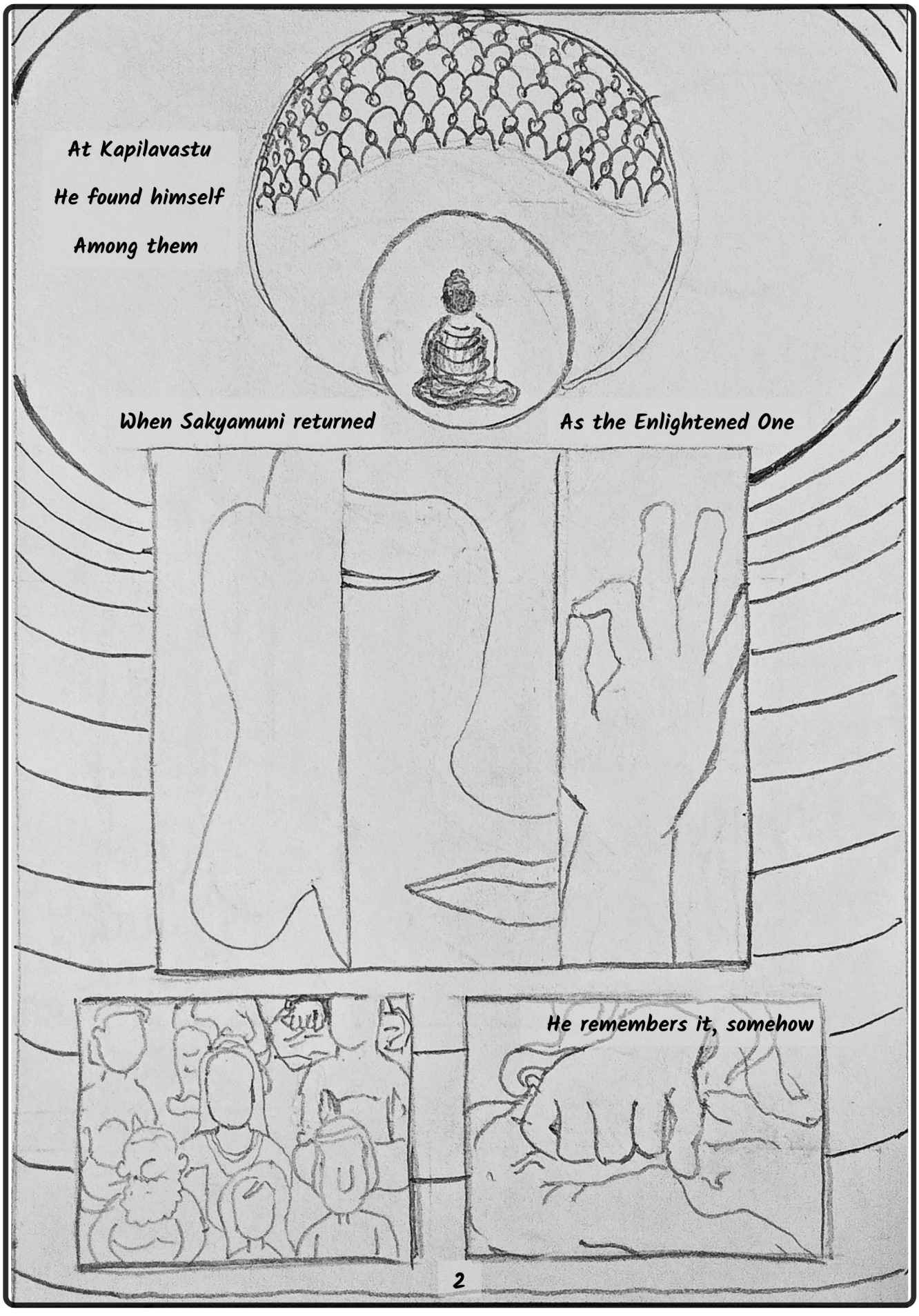

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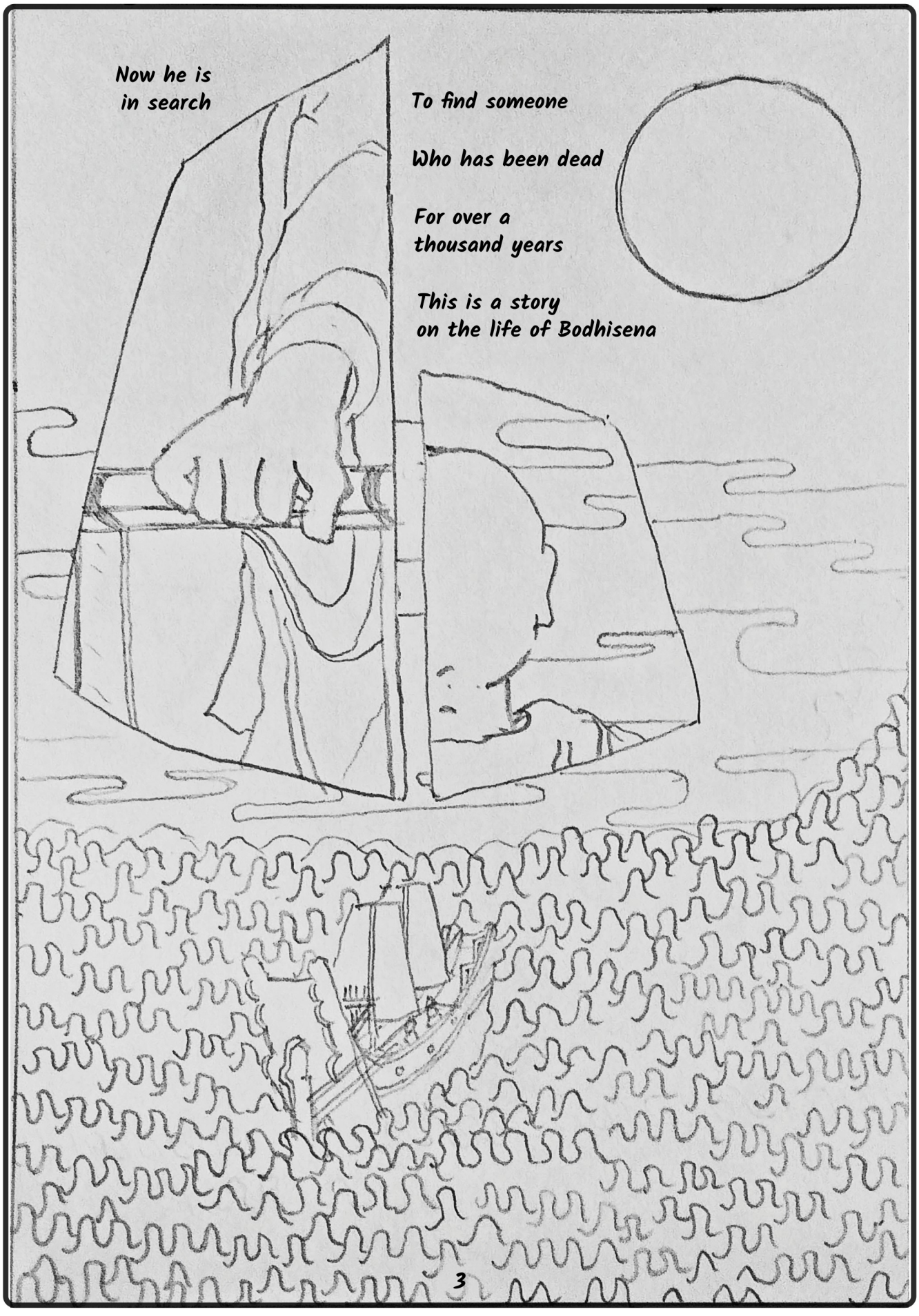

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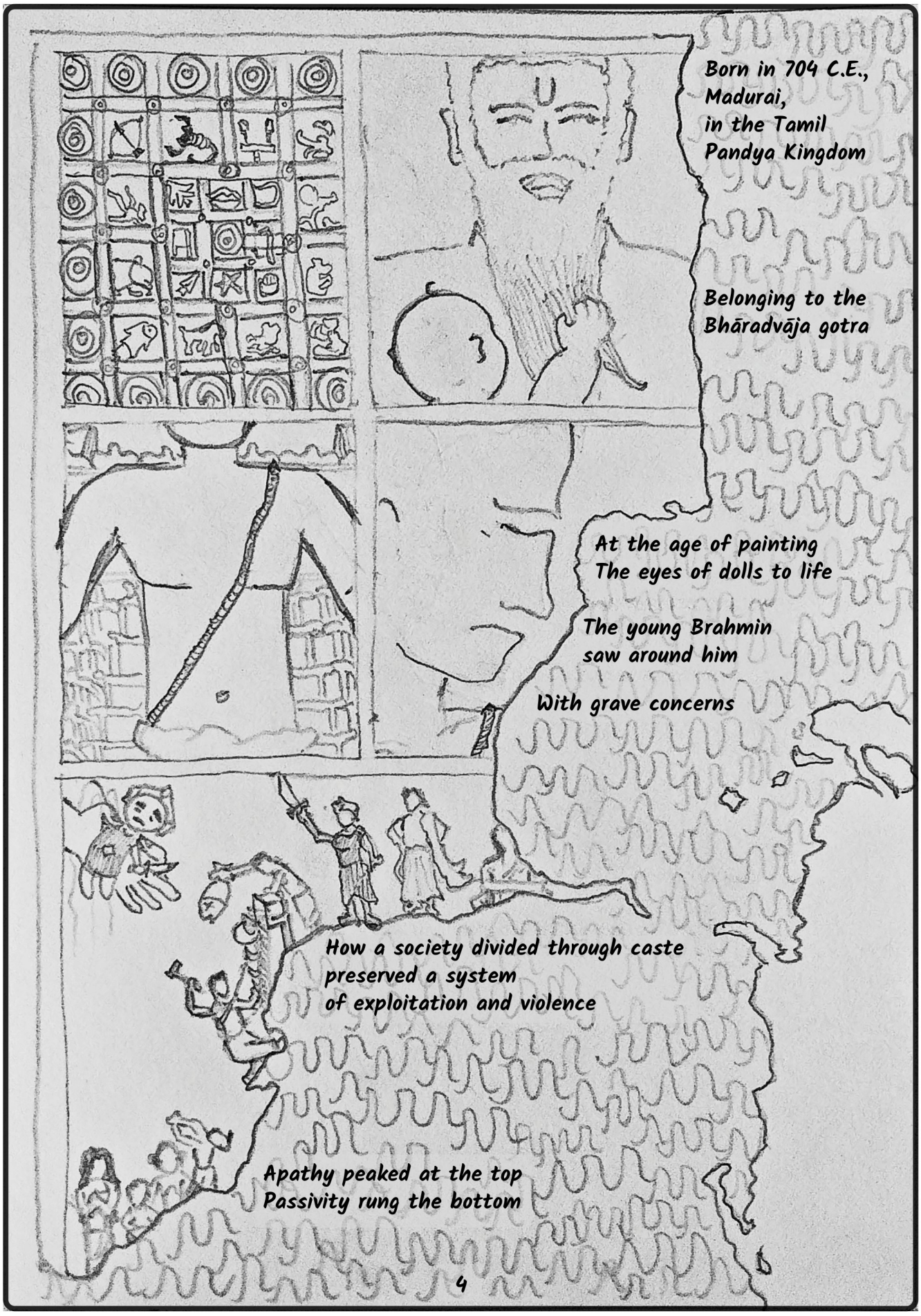
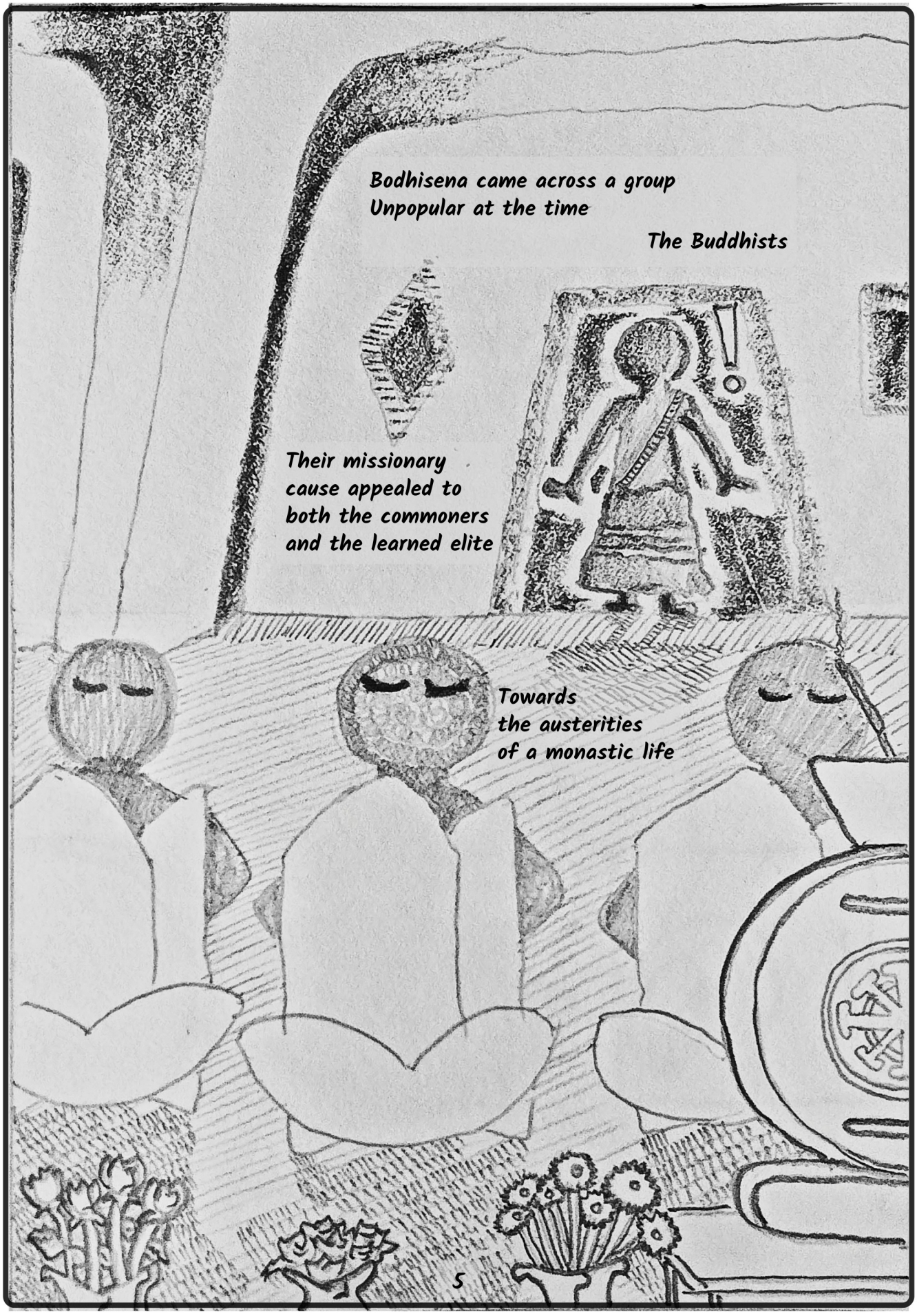
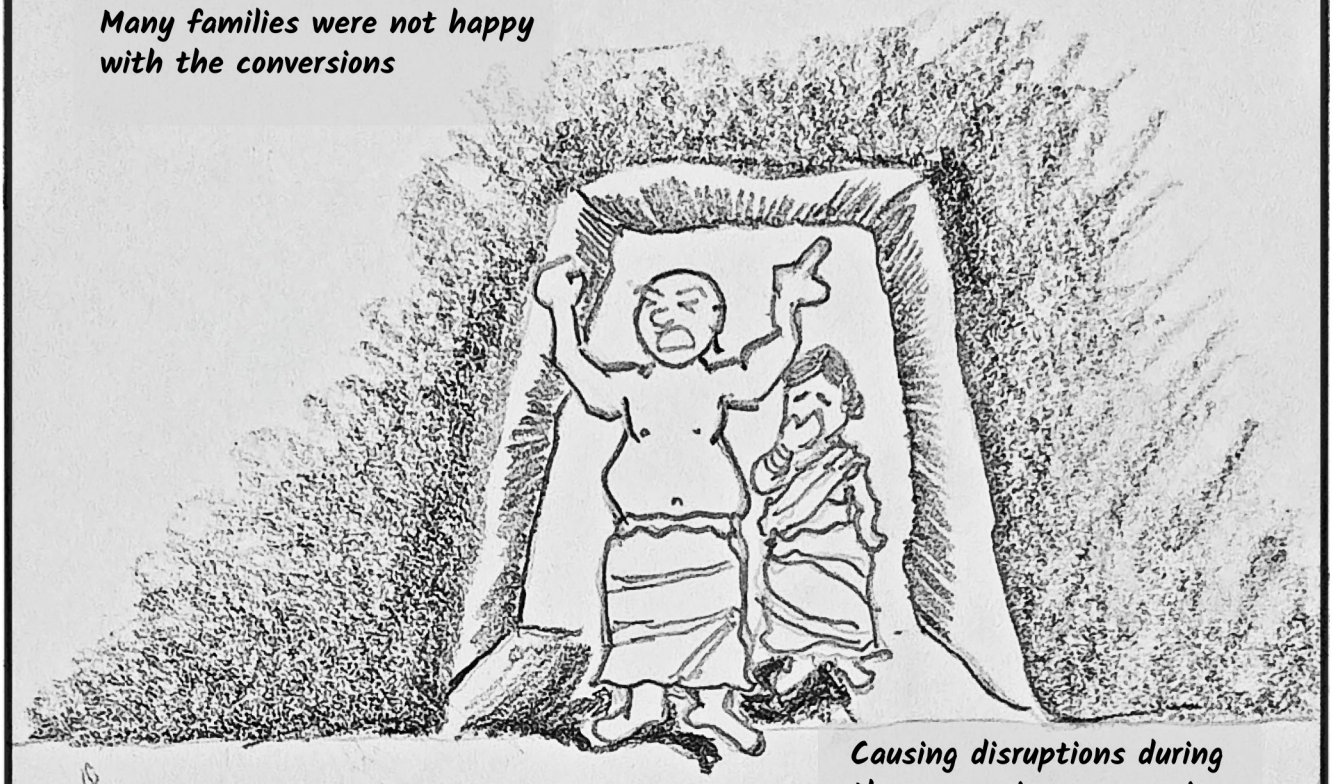


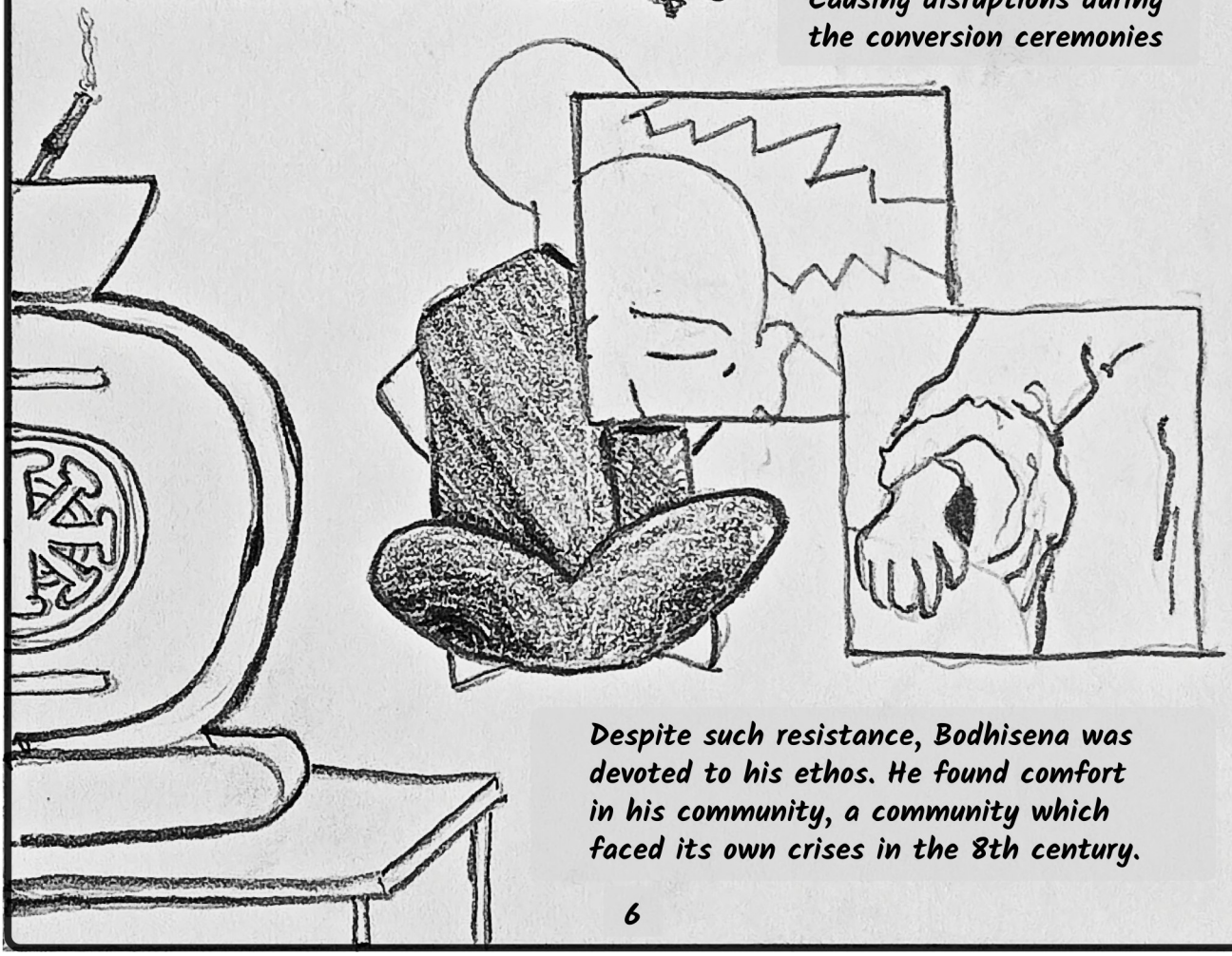
Bodhisena by Anantez



Many families were not happy with the conversions

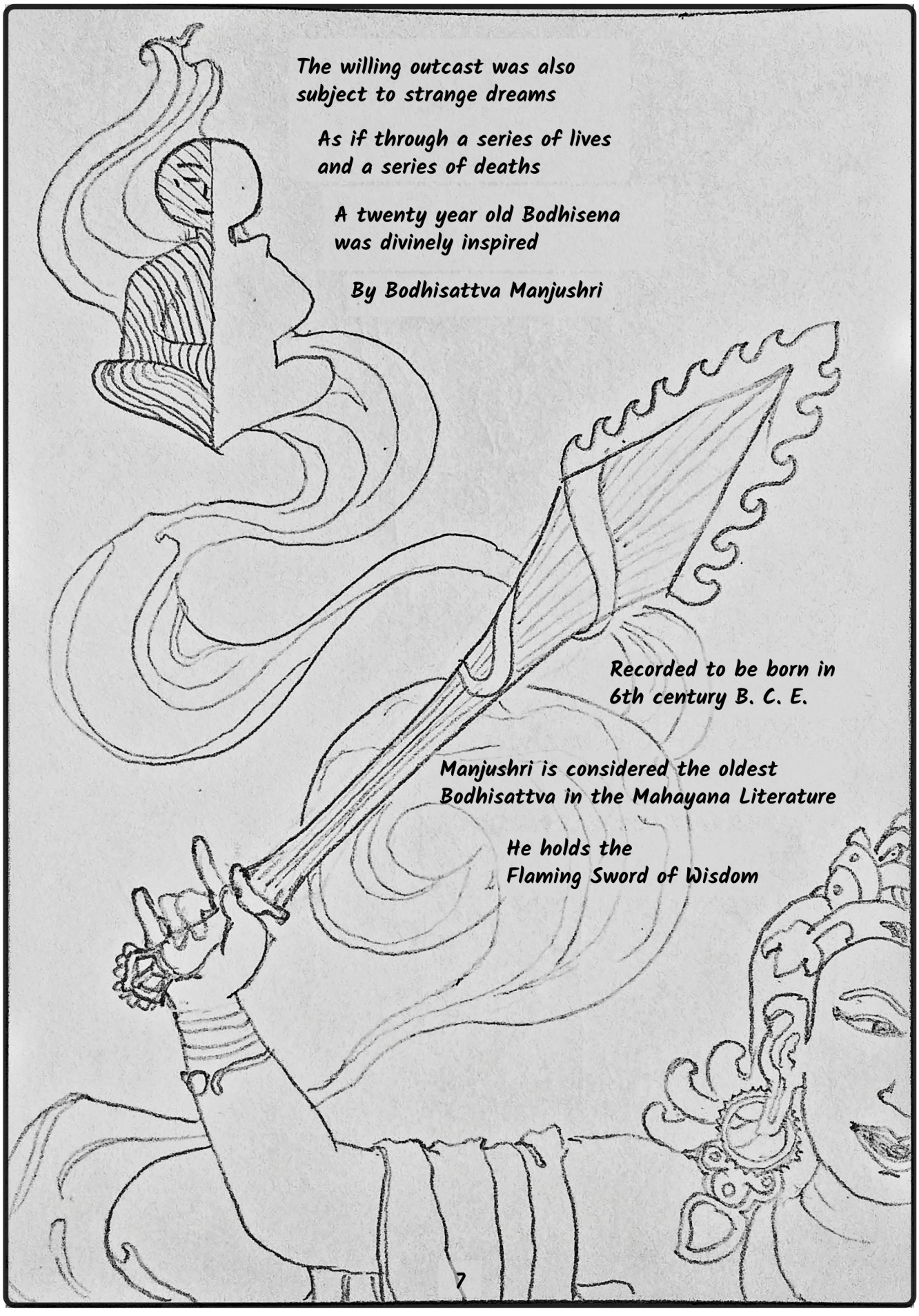


Causing disruptions during the conversion ceremonies

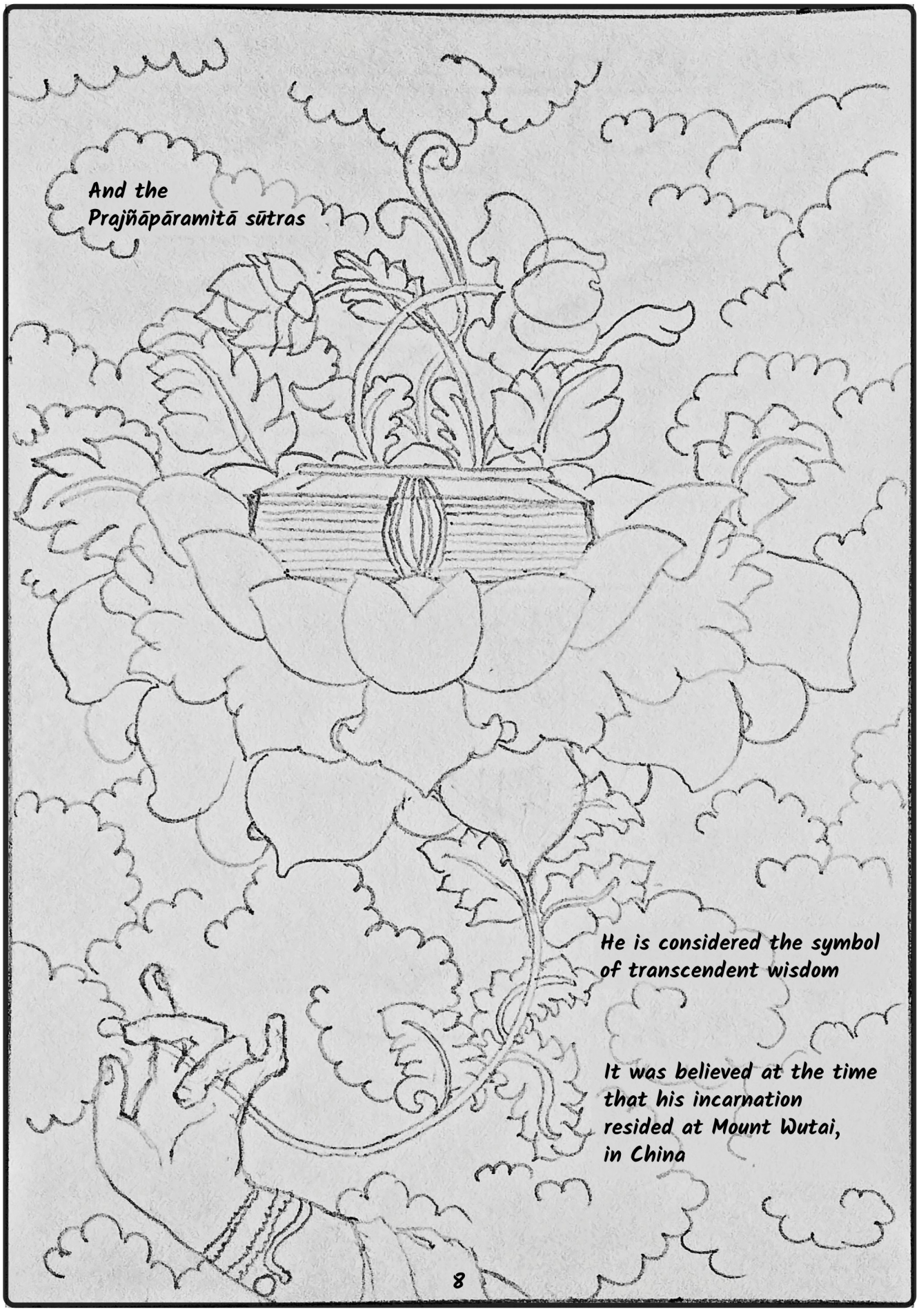


Despite such resistance, Bodhisena was devoted to his ethos. He found comfort in his community, a community which faced its own crises in the 8th century.

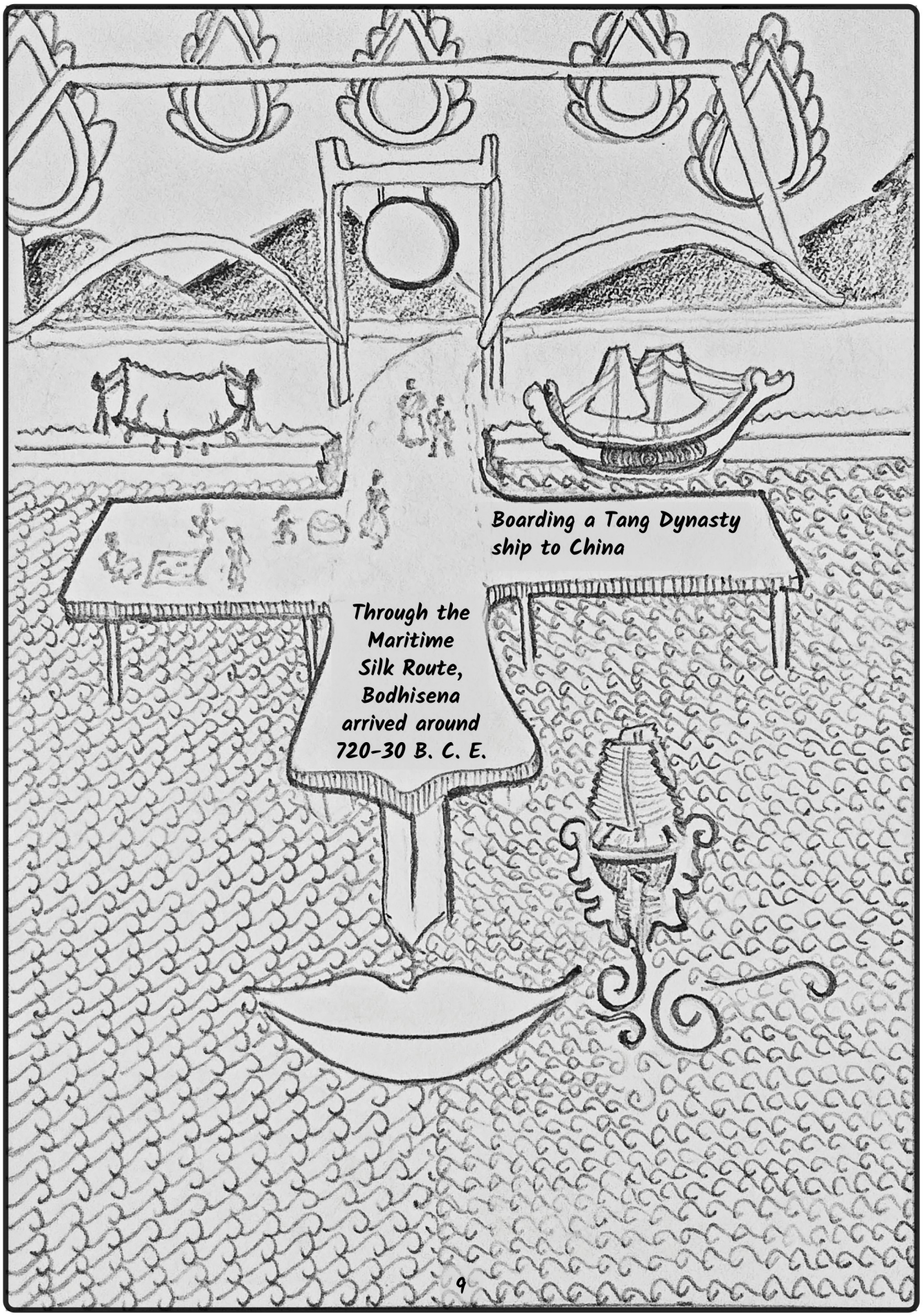
Bodhisena by Anantez

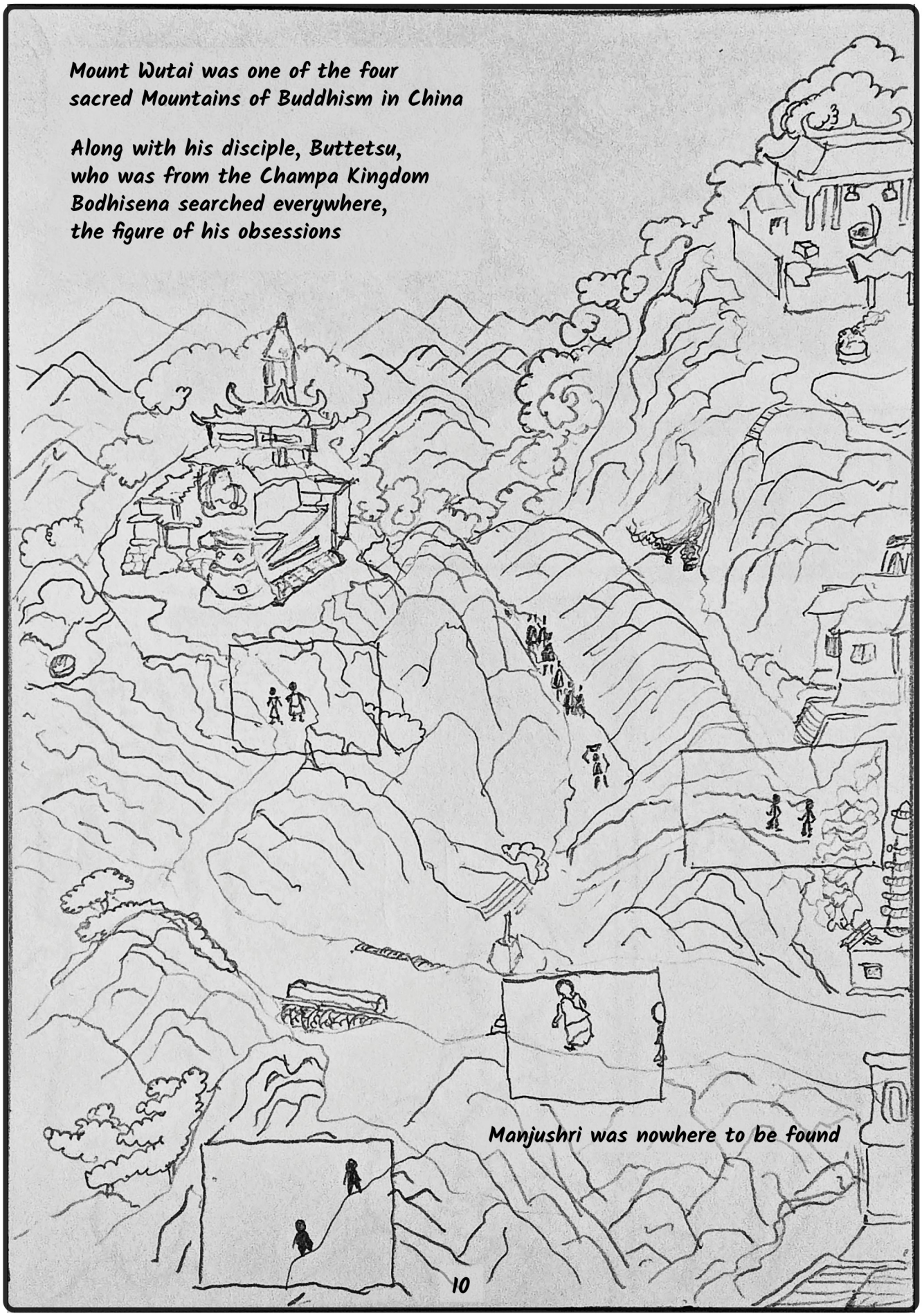

The willing outcast was also
subject to strange dreams
As if through a series of lives
and a series of deaths
A twenty year old Bodhisena
was divinely inspired
By Bodhisattva Manjushri
Recorded to be born in
6th century B. C. E.
Manjushri is considered the oldest
Bodhisattva in the Mahayana Literature
He holds the
Flaming Sword of Wisdom

Bodhisena by Anantez

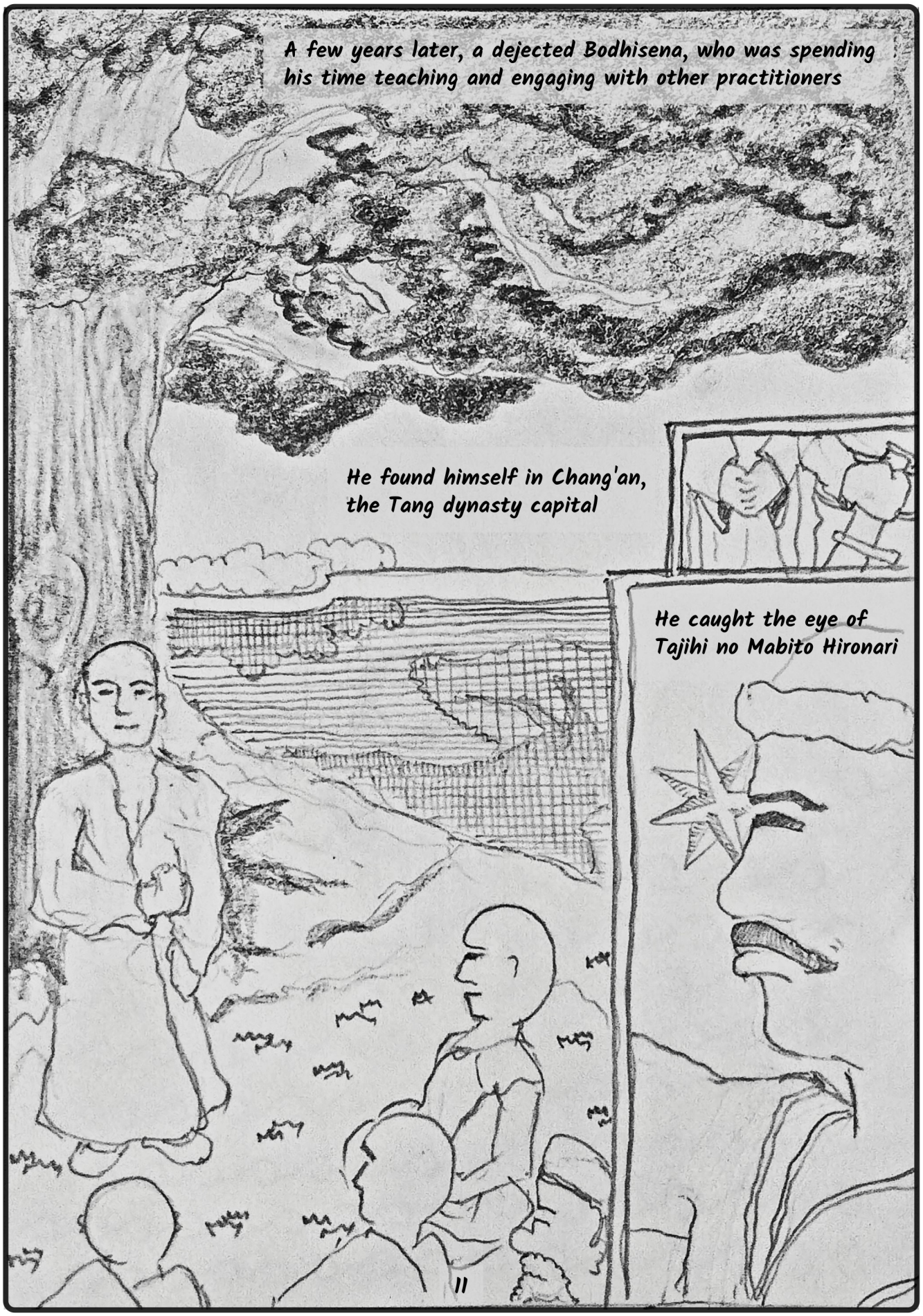

And the
Prajñāpāramitā sūtras
He is considered the symbol of transcendent wisdom
It was believed at the time that his incarnation resided at Mount Wutai, in China

Bodhisena by Anantez

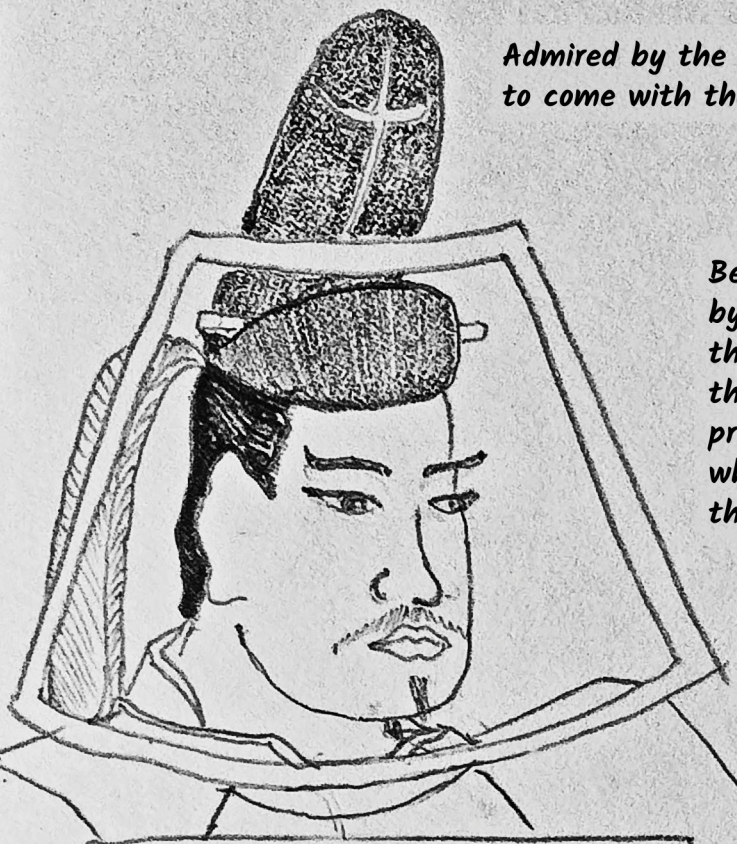



Mount Wutai was one of the four
sacred Mountains of Buddhism in China
Along with his disciple, Buttetsu,
who was from the Champa Kingdom
Bodhisena searched everywhere,
the figure of his obsessions
Manjushri was nowhere to be found

Bodhisena by Anantez

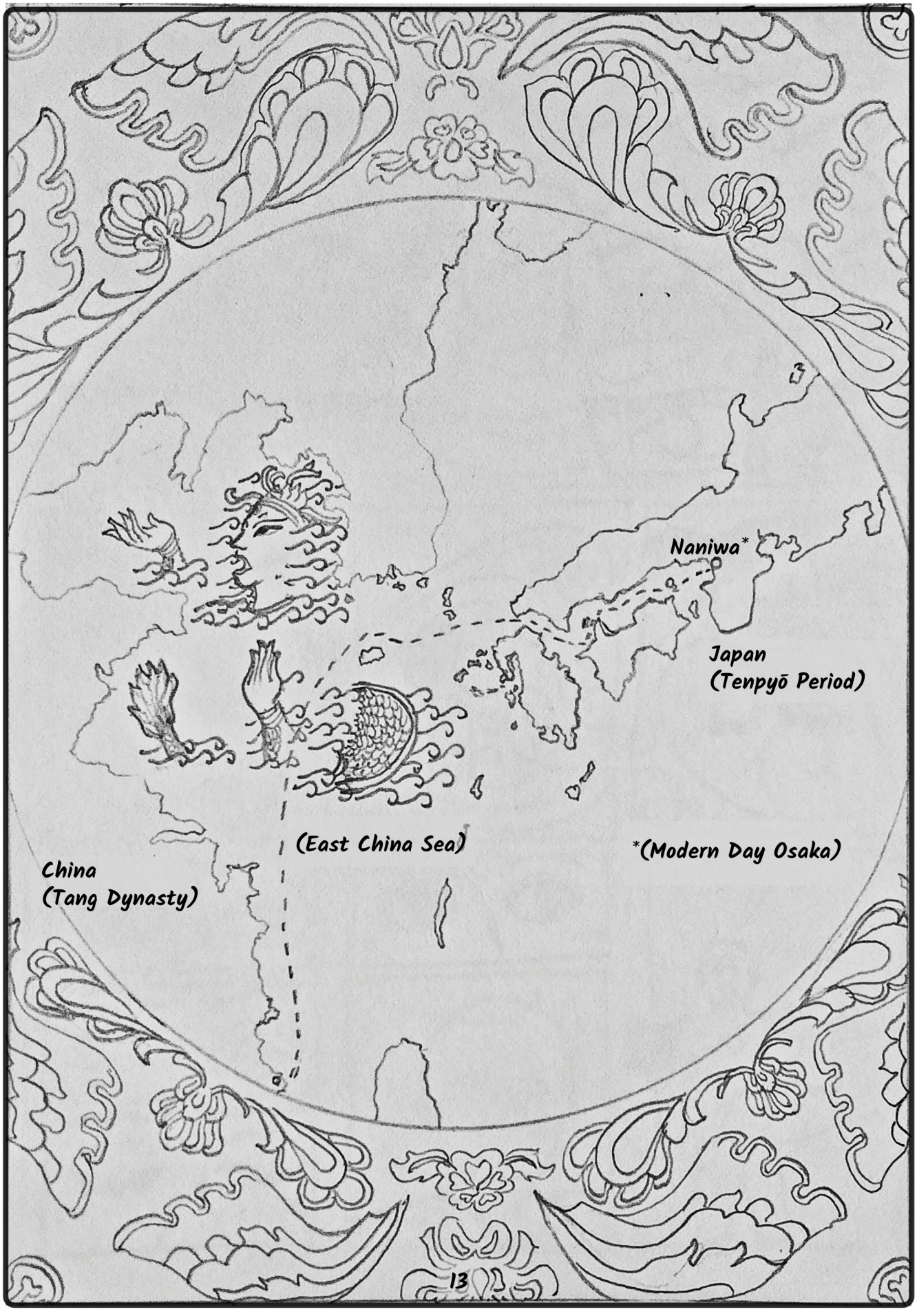

A few years later, a dejected Bodhisena, who was spending his time teaching and engaging with other practitioners
He found himself in Chang'an, the Tang dynasty capital
He caught the eye of Tajihi no Mabito Hironari
11

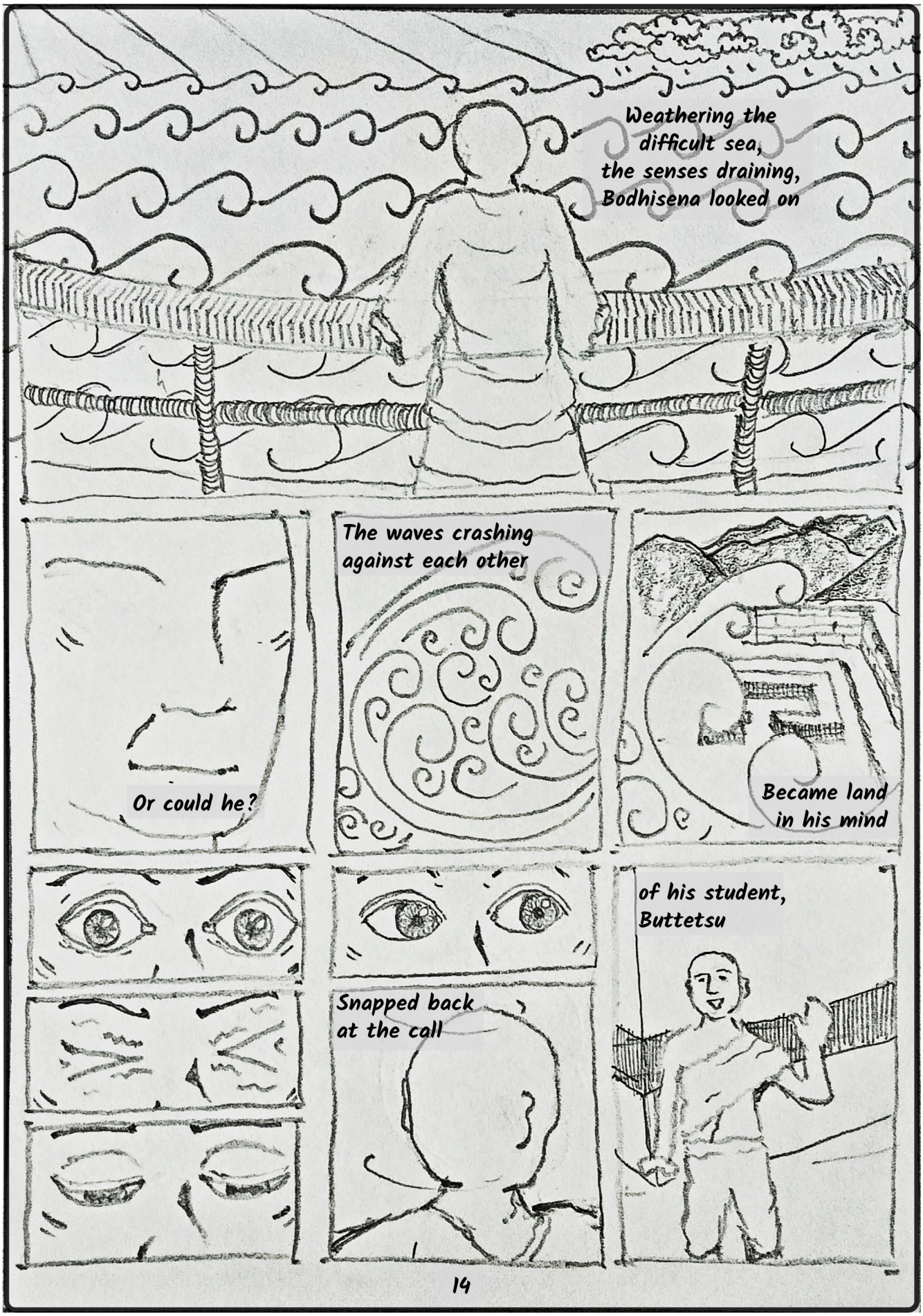
The 10th Japanese ambassador to China,
Hironari was himself a devout Buddhist



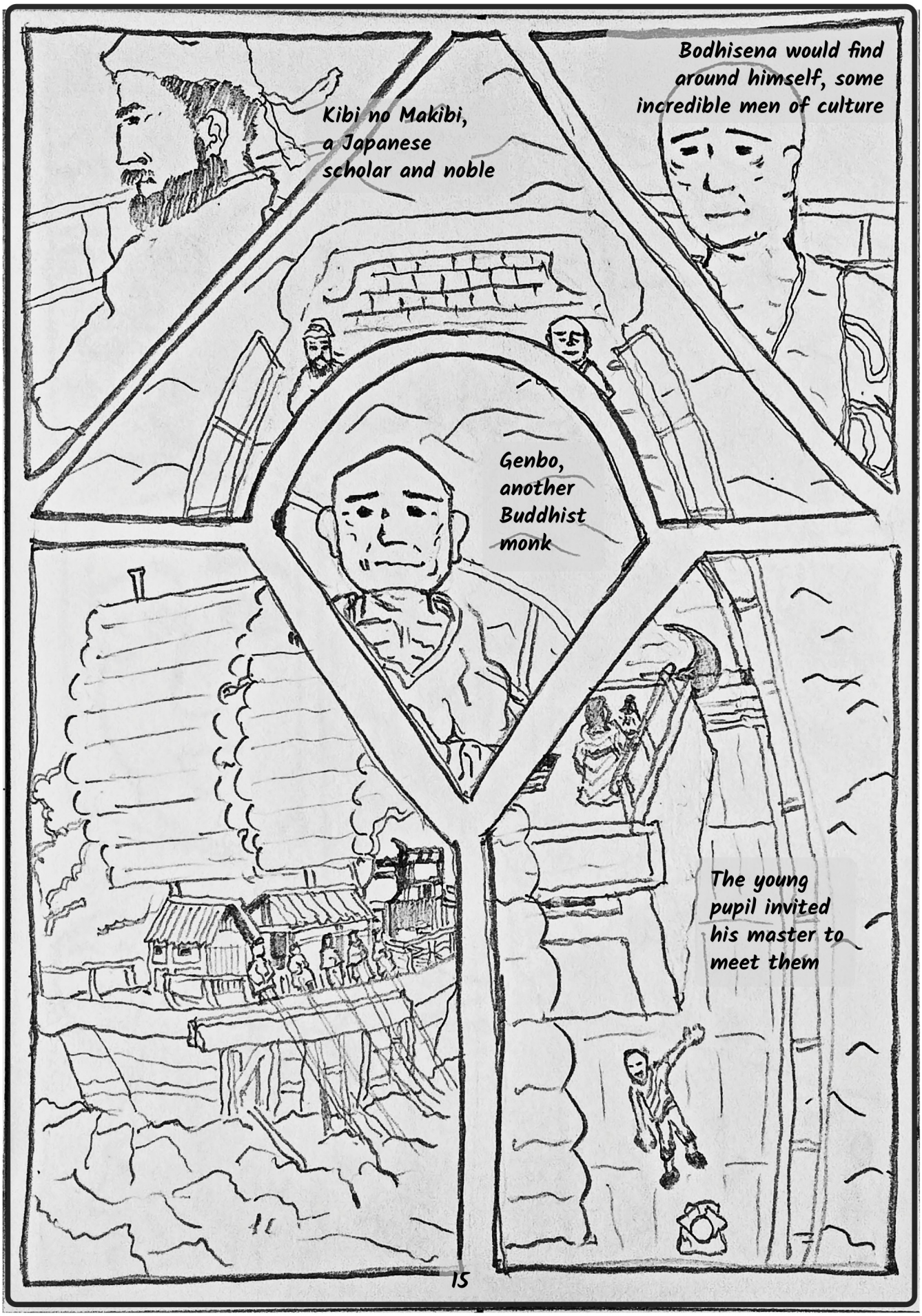
Admired by the delegation, Bodhisena was invited
to come with them on their return to Japan

Before he could be received
by the Emperor,
the journey that lay ahead
through the sea
promised Bodhisena new faces
while rediscovering himself
through old faces as well

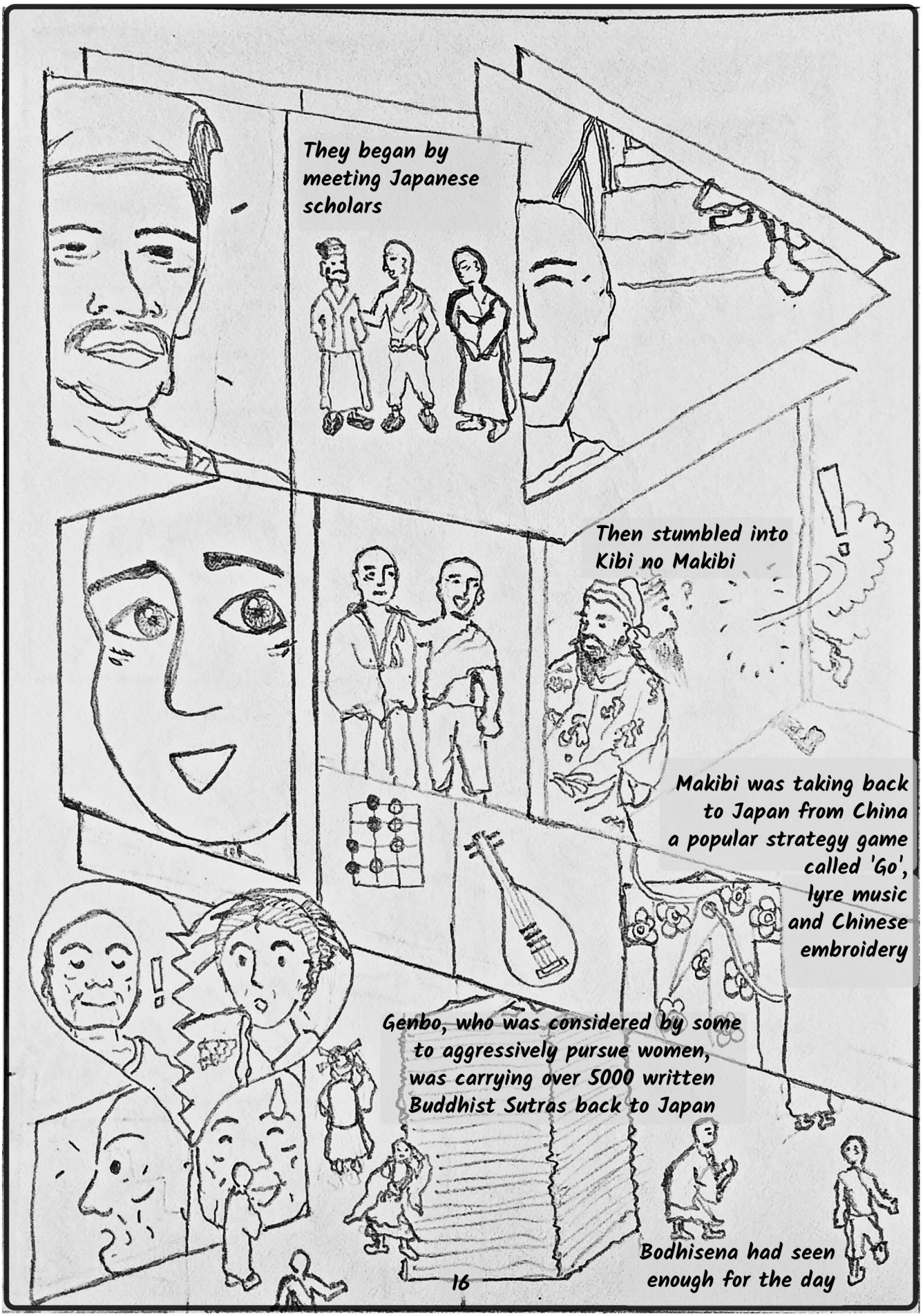

Naniwa*
Japan
(Tenpyō Period)
(East China Sea)
*(Modern Day Osaka)
China
(Tang Dynasty)


Weathering the difficult sea, the senses draining, Bodhisena looked on
The waves crashing against each other
Became land in his mind
Or could he?
of his student, Buttetsu
Snapped back at the call

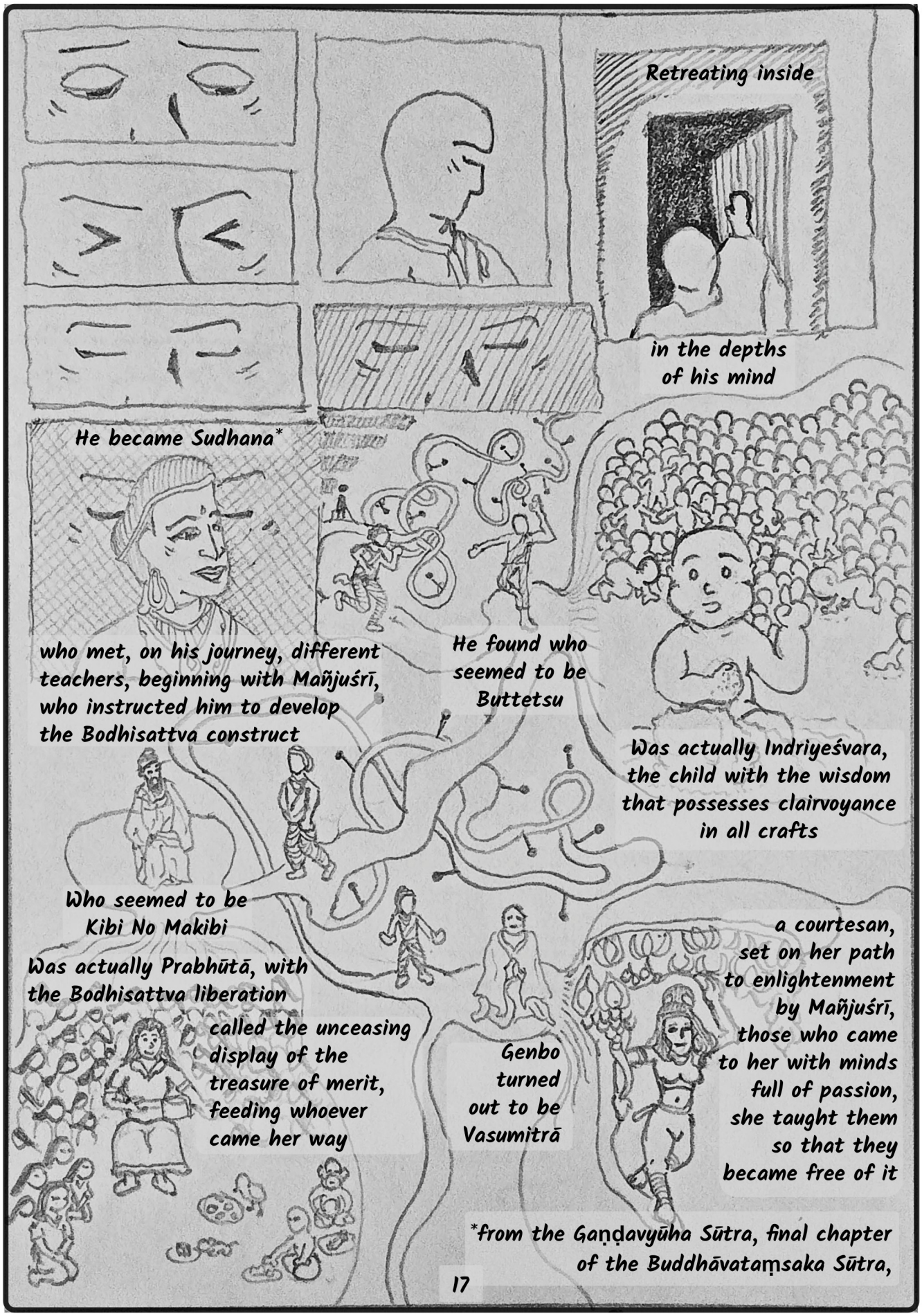
Bodhisena by Anantez


Kibi no Makibi, a Japanese scholar and noble
Bodhisena would find around himself, some incredible men of culture
Genbo, another Buddhist monk
The young pupil invited his master to meet them

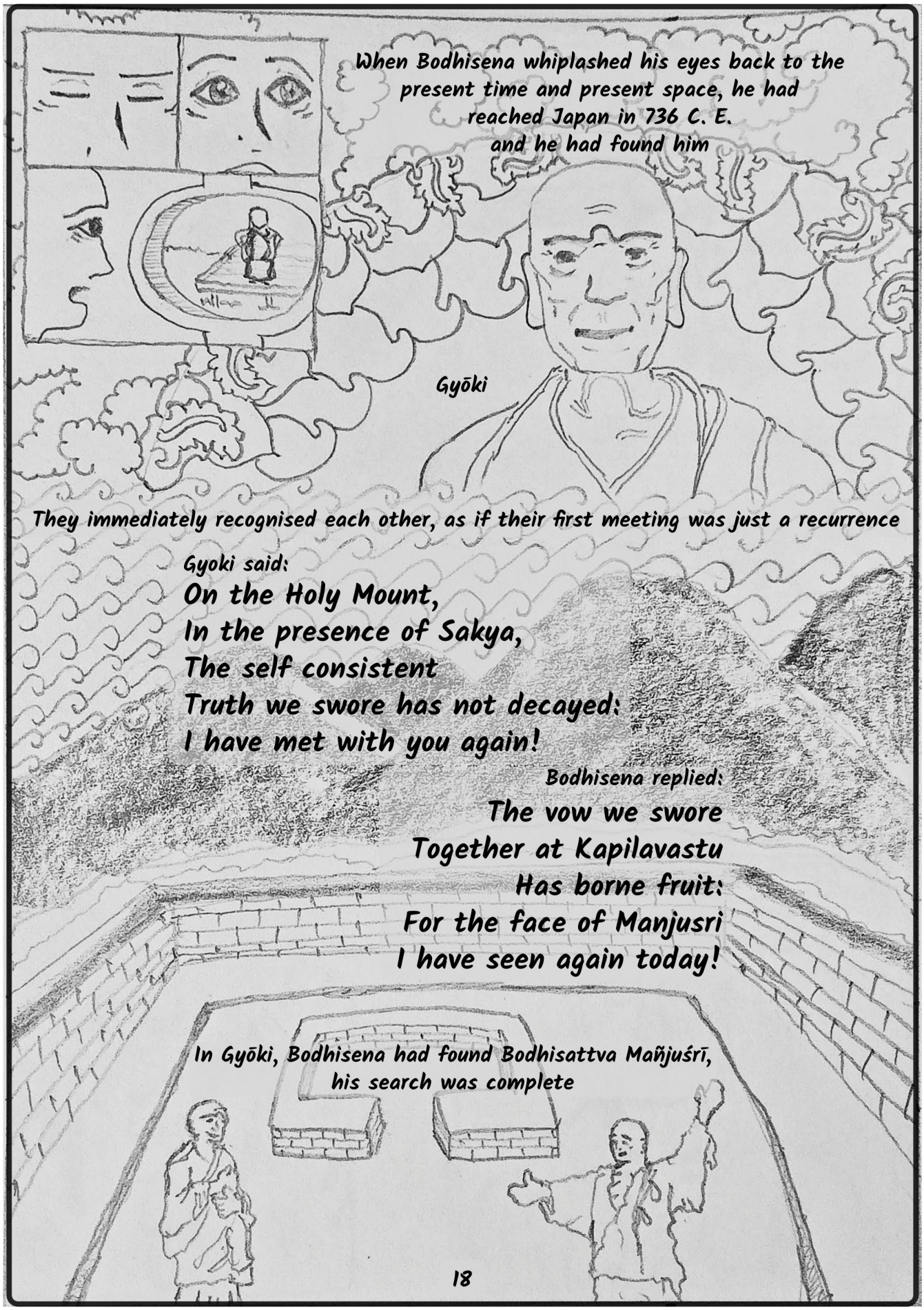
Bodhisena by Anantez


They began by meeting Japanese scholars
Then stumbled into Kibi no Makibi
Makibi was taking back to Japan from China a popular strategy game called 'Go', lyre music and Chinese embroidery
Genbo, who was considered by some to aggressively pursue women, was carrying over 5000 written Buddhist Sutras back to Japan
Bodhisena had seen enough for the day

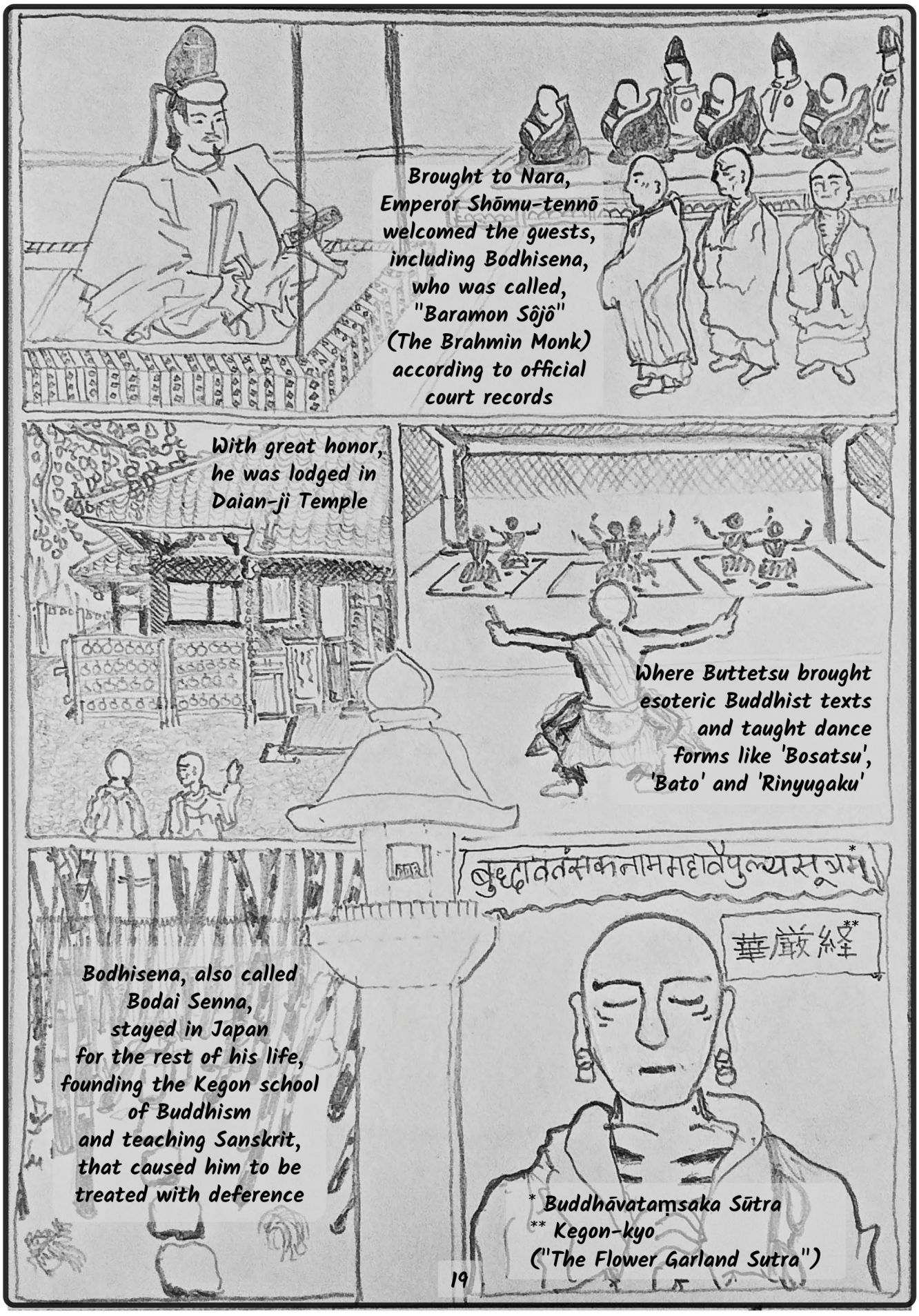
Bodhisena by Anantez


Retreating inside
in the depths of his mind
He became Sudhana*
who met, on his journey, different teachers, beginning with Mañjuśrī, who instructed him to develop the Bodhisattva construct
He found who seemed to be Buttetsu
Was actually Indriyeśvara, the child with the wisdom that possesses clairvoyance in all crafts
Who seemed to be Kibi No Makibi
Was actually Prabhūtā, with the Bodhisattva liberation called the unceasing display of the treasure of merit, feeding whoever came her way
Genbo turned out to be Vasumitrā
a courtesan, set on her path to enlightenment by Mañjuśrī, those who came to her with minds full of passion, she taught them so that they became free of it

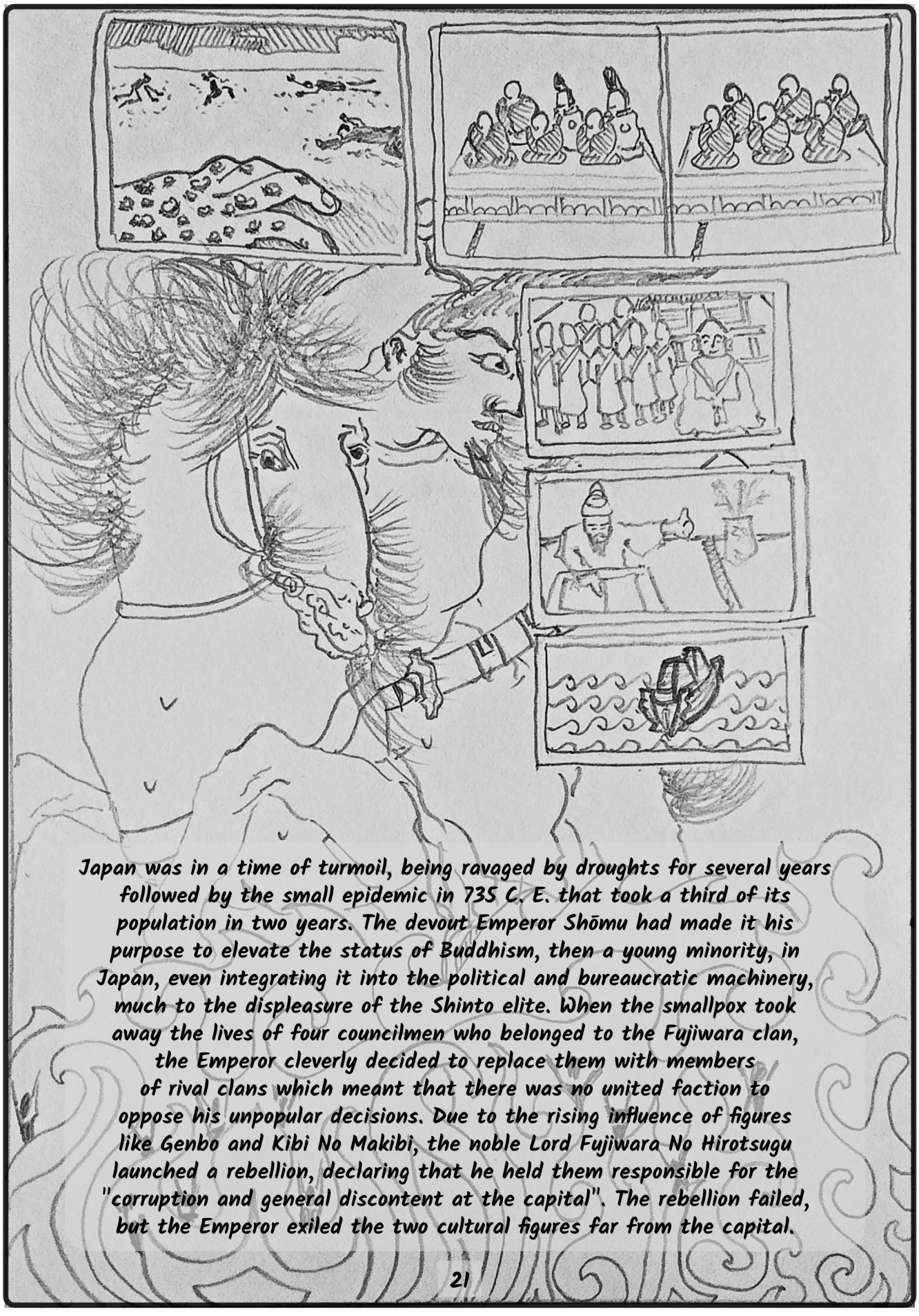
*from the Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra, final chapter of the Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra,


When Bodhisena whiplashed his eyes back to the present time and present space, he had reached Japan in 736 C. E. and he had found him
Gyōki
They immediately recognised each other, as if their first meeting was just a recurrence
Gyoki said:
On the Holy Mount,
In the presence of Sakya,
The self consistent
Truth we swore has not decayed:
I have met with you again!
Bodhisena replied:
The vow we swore
Together at Kapilavastu
Has borne fruit:
For the face of Manjusri
I have seen again today!
In Gyōki, Bodhisena had found Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, his search was complete

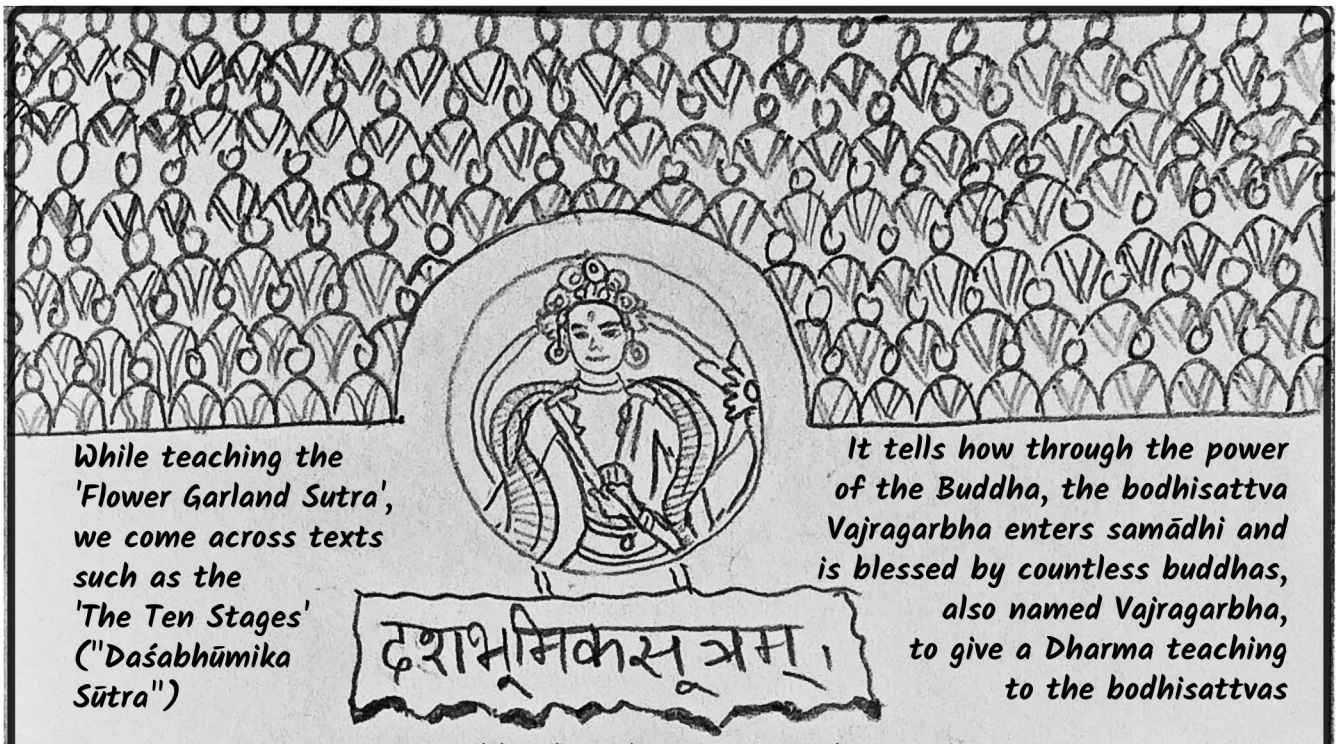
Bodhisena by Anantez



Mount
Tomi
Naniwa
Nara



Japan was in a time of turmoil, being ravaged by droughts for several years followed by the small epidemic in 735 C. E. that took a third of its population in two years. The devout Emperor Shōmu had made it his purpose to elevate the status of Buddhism, then a young minority, in Japan, even integrating it into the political and bureaucratic machinery, much to the displeasure of the Shinto elite. When the smallpox took away the lives of four councilmen who belonged to the Fujiwara clan, the Emperor cleverly decided to replace them with members of rival clans which meant that there was no united faction to oppose his unpopular decisions. Due to the rising influence of figures like Genbo and Kibi No Makibi, the noble Lord Fujiwara No Hirotsugu launched a rebellion, declaring that he held them responsible for the "corruption and general discontent at the capital". The rebellion failed, but the Emperor exiled the two cultural figures far from the capital.



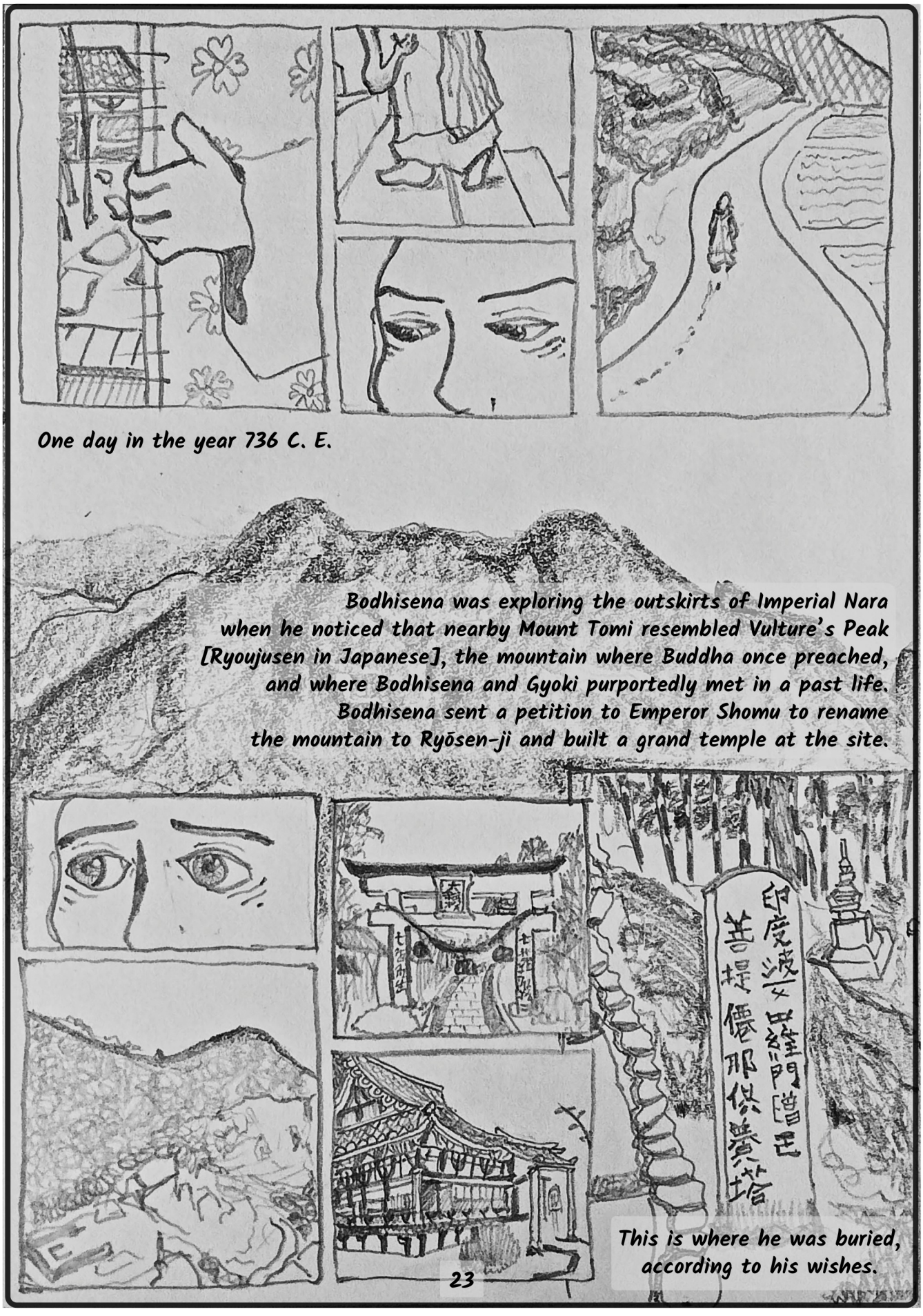
While teaching the 'Flower Garland Sutra', we come across texts such as the 'The Ten Stages' ("Daśabhūmika Sūtra")

It tells how through the power of the Buddha, the bodhisattva Vajragarbha enters samādhi and is blessed by countless buddhas, also named Vajragarbha, to give a Dharma teaching to the bodhisattvas

Vajragarbha describes successively the ten bhūmis of a bodhisattva, which include:

1. Perfect Joy: of initial motivation.
2. Stainless: practice of ten good actions and avoidance of ten bad actions.
3. Shining: contemplating the wisdom of the buddhas and how its absence causes beings to suffer in saṃsāra.
4. Brilliance: becomimg a member of the family of the buddhas.
5. Difficult to Conquer: wisdom including seeing that beings live in a state of ignorance, without losing compassion.
6. Manifested: seeing the phases of dependent origination and having compassion for beings who are under its power
7. Gone Far: apprehending countless worlds, buddhas, and eons, the thoughts and motivations of countless beings.
8. Unwavering: seeing the suffering of beings and therefore strives for enlightenment like a person trying to wake oneself from a nightmare.
9. Perfect Understanding: so that one can guide beings in various ways.
10. Cloud of Dharma: A bodhisattva on the tenth bhūmi enters millions of samādhis, concluding with the samādhi called the unique consecration for omniscient wisdom.

Bodhisena by Anantez

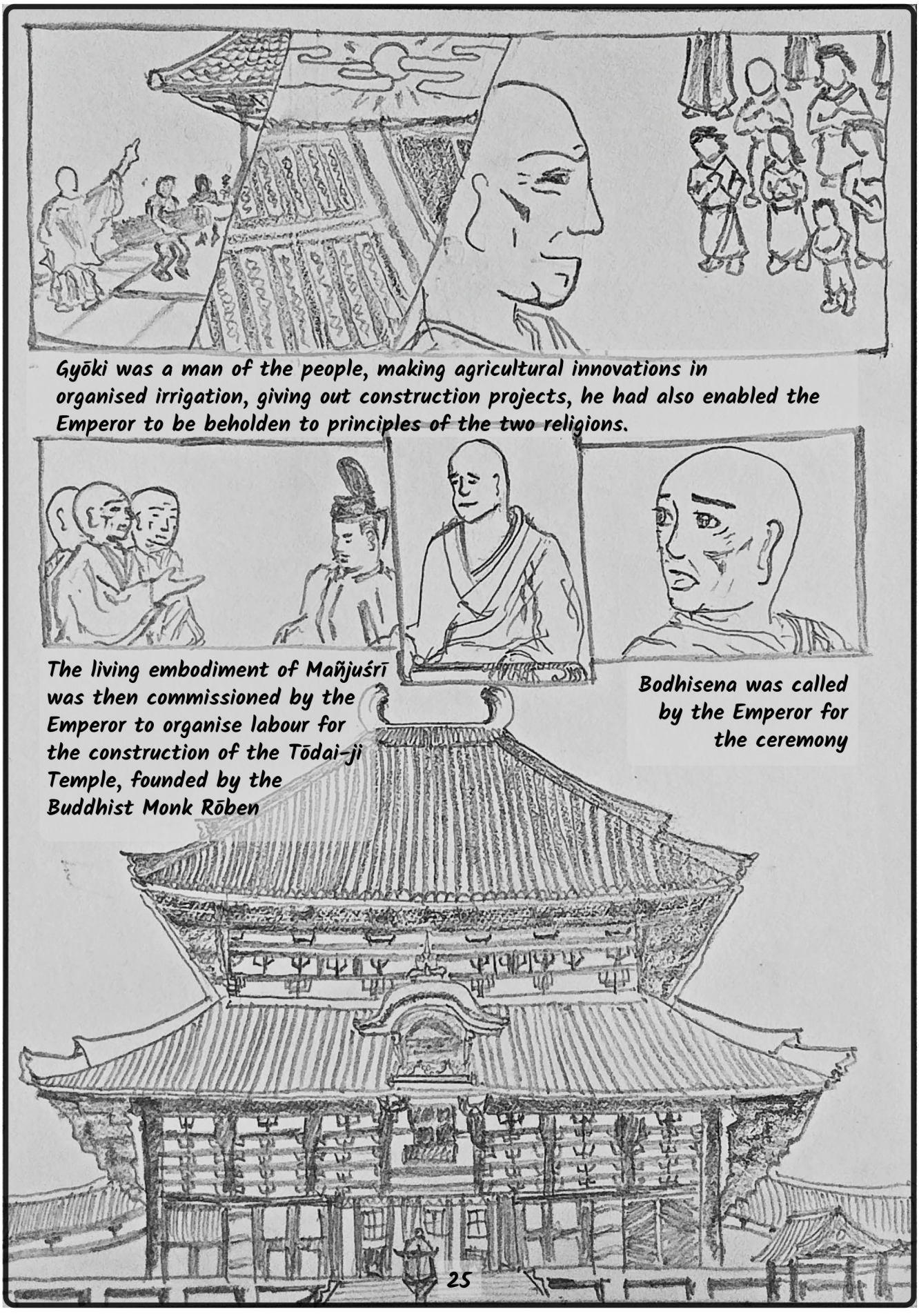

One day in the year 736 C. E.
Bodhisena was exploring the outskirts of Imperial Nara when he noticed that nearby Mount Tomi resembled Vulture's Peak [Ryoujusen in Japanese], the mountain where Buddha once preached, and where Bodhisena and Gyoki purportedly met in a past life. Bodhisena sent a petition to Emperor Shomu to rename the mountain to Ryōsen-ji and built a grand temple at the site.
This is where he was buried, according to his wishes.

Meanwhile, around 749 C. E., Gyōki set upon an ambitious task

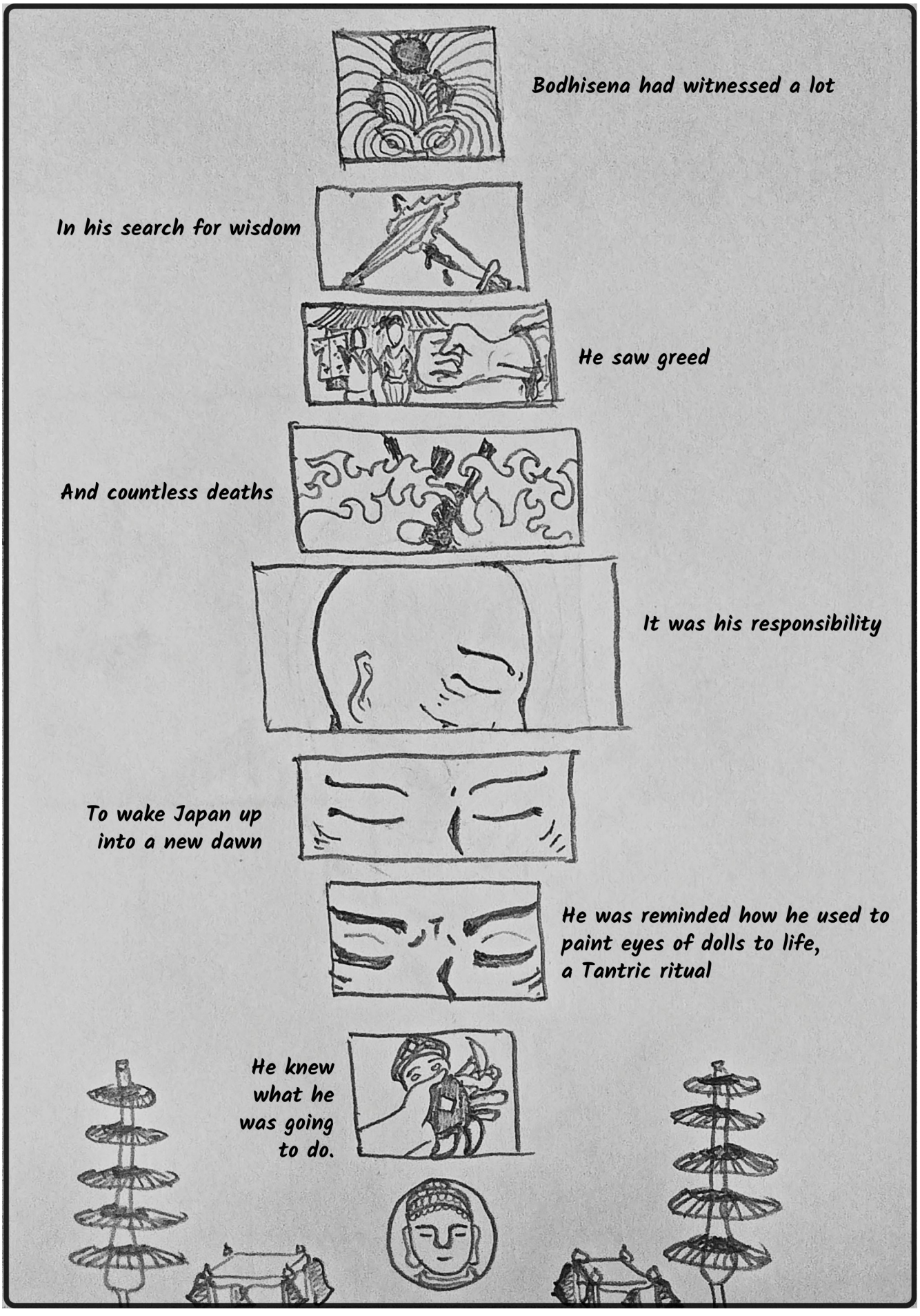
meditating on the nature of Shinto and Buddhism, he returned having discovered that the Vairocana Buddha was compatible with Amaterasu, the Shinto Sun Goddess and mother of the Imperial line.

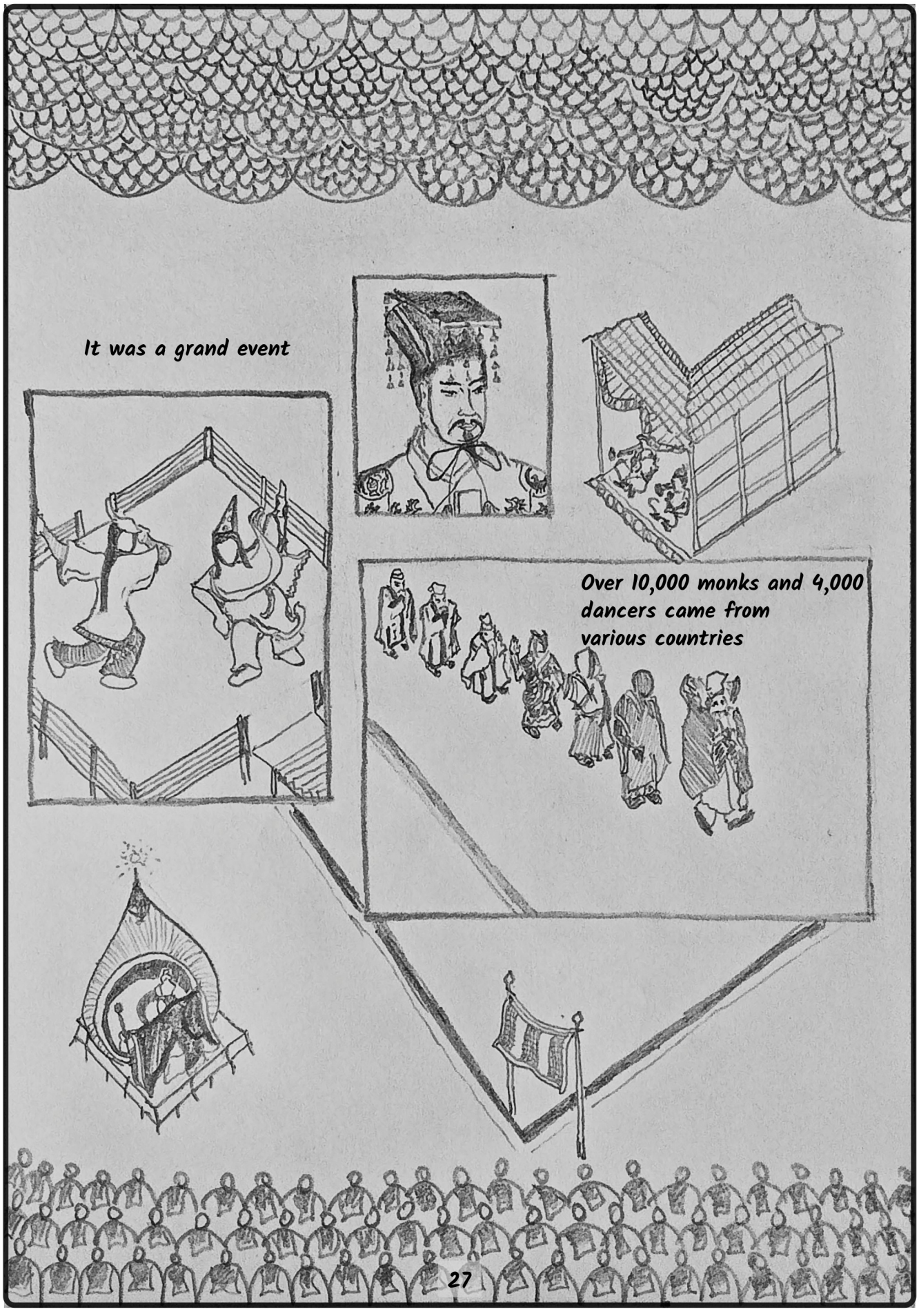
He also noted that Shinto Kami worship was compatible with Bodhisattva worship.

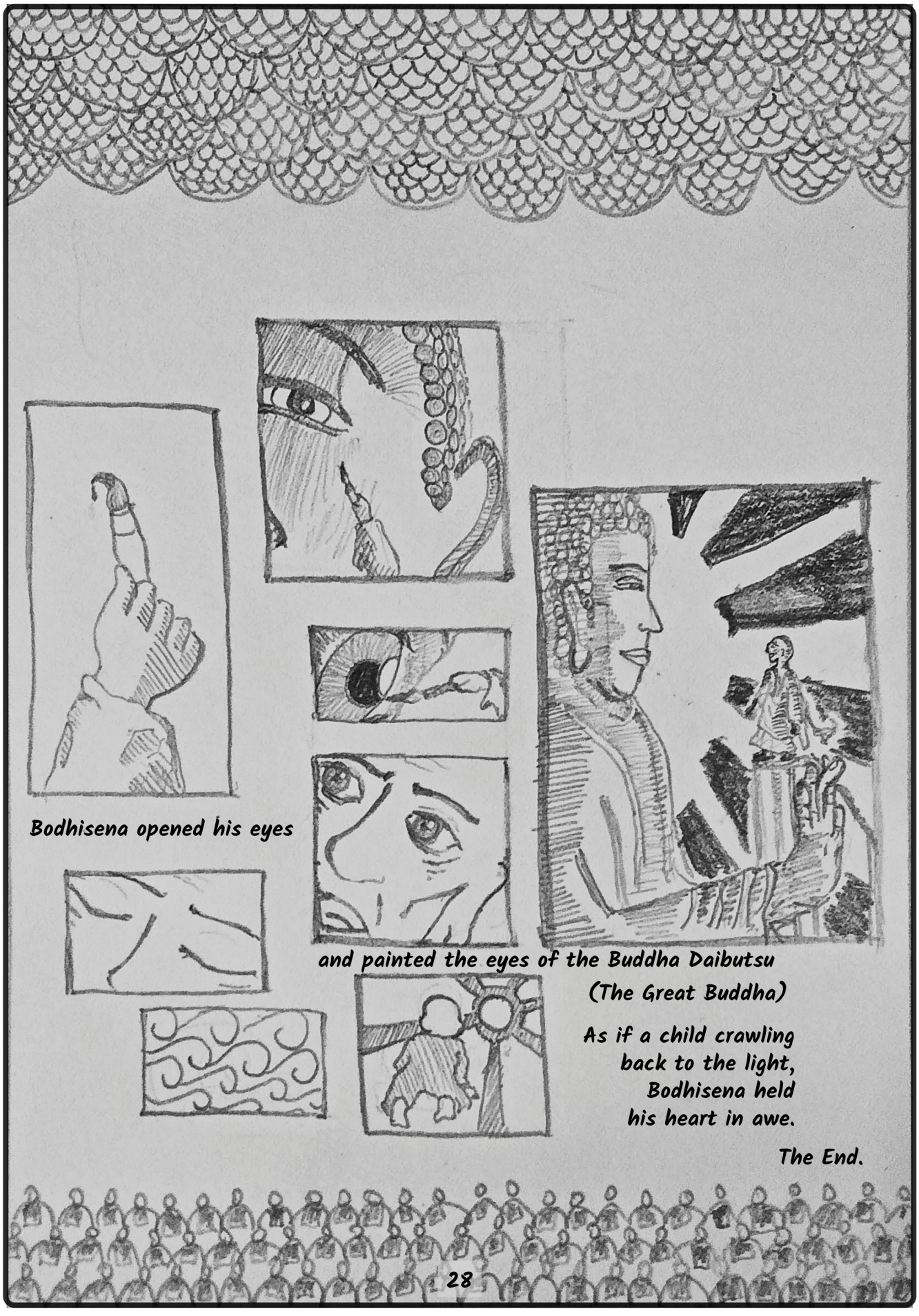
Bodhisena by Anantez


Gyōki was a man of the people, making agricultural innovations in organised irrigation, giving out construction projects, he had also enabled the Emperor to be beholden to principles of the two religions.
The living embodiment of Mañjuśrī was then commissioned by the Emperor to organise labour for the construction of the Tōdai-ji Temple, founded by the Buddhist Monk Rōben
Bodhisena was called by the Emperor for the ceremony

Bodhisena by Anantez


Bodhisena had witnessed a lot
In his search for wisdom
He saw greed
And countless deaths
It was his responsibility
To wake Japan up into a new dawn
He was reminded how he used to paint eyes of dolls to life, a Tantric ritual
He knew what he was going to do.


It was a grand event
Over 10,000 monks and 4,000 dancers came from various countries


Bodhisena opened his eyes
and painted the eyes of the Buddha Daibutsu
(The Great Buddha)
As if a child crawling
back to the light,
Bodhisena held
his heart in awe.
The End.